

U.S. must honor its commitment to soldiers, families

The following is an editorial that recently appeared in the Portsmouth Herald and Rockingham News newspapers.

Early Monday morning, 138 members of the New Hampshire Army National Guard's 3,643rd Security Company shipped out for Iraq.

We were privileged to meet them and their families as their flight stopped to refuel at Pease International Airport, and we are grateful the National Guard commanders were able to schedule this fuel stop here rather than in Bangor, Maine, to allow these brief but sweet family reunions.

The effort was clearly appreciated by the guardsmen and their families, many of whom had traveled hours for this brief extra visit before their loved ones deployed to Iraq for 12 months.

Often, when we think about sacrifice during wartime, we think of the soldiers who risk their lives on the field of battle. And there is no doubt that the 3,643rd has a challenging mission in the coming 12 months in Iraq, guarding detainees and providing security to military convoys.

But there is another type of sacrifice made during times of war that is not mentioned as often, but is just as real, and that is the sacrifice made by soldiers' families.

At Pease early Monday morning, there were young men and women who have been married a year and yet have spent only a few weeks together because of the demands of the war. There was a father in fatigues holding his newborn baby and wife, trying to get in a year's worth of hugs in just a few hours. There were mothers with older children who have been raising them alone, holding the family together, keeping the finances in order. There were mothers and fathers who put on a brave face in front of their Guard sons and daughters, but who privately admitted their anxiety over this mission.

The months leading up to this deployment have been immensely stressful for military families, and many expressed relief to finally be going to Iraq, to start the clock ticking on the time they can come home. These guardsmen and their families have honored their commitment to our country. We, in turn, must keep our commitment to them. If the deployment is 18 months with 12 months spent in Iraq, then that is what the deployment should be and not a day more.

We must urge our leaders to treat the life of every soldier with the same care and respect as they would want for their own sons and daughters. We must not allow our leaders to be reckless.

It is our fervent hope that each and every one of these brave young men and women will return healthy and whole to the families and communities that so dearly love them. Our thoughts and prayers will be with them today and every day until we have the honor and pleasure of welcoming them home.